

## Contributors



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... and seven Business Profiles

## Last mission in Iraq: Protect polling places

*The immediacy of e-mail has changed the nature of both the front line and the home front. Soldiers deployed in Iraq, and other duty stations in the Middle East, and their families can trade messages and photos on an almost real-time basis. And, soldiers' families forward the news via e-mail.*

*Here's a good news e-mail sent by Dan Smith earlier this month to Buddy Bynum, editor of The Meridian Star, about the son of a mutual friend.*

**Buddy,**

You may not remember Mike Snowden from Meridian. He graduated with me in '69. We have kept in touch all these years, and for a while even lived next to each other in Gulfport.

His oldest son, Michael, is a West Point graduate and an Apache pilot in the U.S. Army. Michael just completed a year in Iraq, and his now headed to Texas by way of Kuwait and Germany.

Mike sent me this e-mail and it has moved me greatly. I think we can now put into perspective what our forefathers went through so many times ... I wanted to share it with the people in Meridian and asked if it was OK to send it to the paper. He gave me his blessings, so here it is. Thanks.

**Dan Smith**  
Franklin, Tenn.

...

**Dan,**

I just wanted to drop you a line and thank you and all your friends who have prayed for Michael.

He e-mailed us yesterday to let us know he was promoted from 1st lieutenant to captain. He was pretty pumped since he had only been a 1st lieutenant for 11 months.

He called us on Monday to tell us about his last combat mission which was on Sunday, election day in Iraq. He, and the platoon of Apaches he commands, were flying over Mosul, Iraq.

Michael said it was the most incredible thing he had ever seen. People were walking from miles around to the polling places to vote. There were points in time when mortars were being fired and bombs were going off — but they kept coming.

He said at one point there were over 4,000 people in line to vote at one polling site. He said it was just amazing to see the human spirit doing what it had to do to get freedom. They stood aerial guard over the city for the entire day and he was so excited to be able to have seen this happen on his last day of flying in Iraq and his last combat mission.

He said nothing would ever keep him from voting because he had seen those people literally risking their lives to vote. I don't think I've ever heard him speak in such an inspired way as he did on Monday. He said it was the best exclamation mark on his tour of duty that he could have gotten. He said, "Freedom and the right to express it."

Well, I can tell you I had a lump in my throat and there was a moment when no one could speak. Afterwards I thought to myself how I could never be worried about America's future because these young warriors are the people who will be leading America soon and they have this renewed understanding of freedom branded in their minds.

Michael told us that he was leaving Iraq on Friday and going to Kuwait. That means he is flying his aircraft to Kuwait even as I write this letter. He thinks he will be there a few days and then they will fly back to Germany.

Vickie and I are flying to Germany Feb. 24 in order to spend about 10 days with him. We are excited about that as you might imagine ... Thanks again for all your prayers and support. Take care.

**Mike**

## Another angel falls

*This story is about Sgt. Robert McNail of the Mississippi Army National Guard's 150th Combat Engineer Battalion. The author is Ricky Posey of the Army Guard's Family Assistance Center in Meridian.*

**By Ricky Posey**

special to The Star

Sgt. Robert A. "Mac" McNail voluntarily enlisted in the Active Army. After he was discharged, he voluntarily enlisted on Feb. 25, 1997, in Detachment 1, Company B, 150th Combat Engineer Battalion of the Mississippi Army National Guard.

In May 2004, his unit was alerted for deployment. He was mobilized to Camp Shelby in August, where he began vigorous training in preparation for deployment to Iraq.

In January 2005, his battalion was deployed to Iraq as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom III.

Sgt. McNail was an outstanding soldier who loved what he did. His decorations include: the Army Achievement Medal,



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Sgt. Robert A. 'Mac' McNail

Southwest Asia Service Medal with Bronze Star, Army Good Conduct Medal, Overseas Service Ribbon, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, Liberation of Kuwait Medal and Army Service Ribbon.

It is with sorrow that I write this because Sgt. McNail was

killed in a tragic vehicle accident on Feb. 11, 2005.

This is but one more example of the type of men and women who are putting their lives on the line to ensure America remains free.

Thanks, "Mac," for making the ultimate sacrifice.